

Shernold School

Independent school inspection report

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Unique Reference Number (URN)	118972
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Reporting inspector	Linda Kelsey HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Shernold School, founded in 1935, is a co-educational preparatory school for pupils aged from 3 to 11 years. The aims of the school are to provide a broad education of high quality which enables pupils to reach high standards and to prepare them well for their next stage of education. The school occupies four floors of a large house in a residential area in Maidstone, in Kent.

Currently there are 115 children and pupils on roll, of whom 28 are in the Early Years Foundation Stage. There are no children receiving government funded nursery education. Most of those on roll are of White British background, and 10% are of Asian heritage. Ten pupils have English as an additional language and there are no pupils on the register for special educational needs and/or disabilities.

At the time of the last inspection in June 2007, the school was judged to be good and complied with nearly all of the regulations. It was required to improve provision of information to parents, to meet all the requirements for pupils' welfare and for handling complaints and to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. It was also required to ensure that it tracks pupils' progress and sets targets for pupils by making use of assessment information to set challenging targets for pupils.

Evaluation of the school

Shernold School meets its aims and provides a good quality of education, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It also has some outstanding aspects of provision. This all results in the high attendance of pupils and good progress throughout the school, leading to high attainment by Year 6. The good teaching and strong curriculum mean that pupils enjoy school and all it has to offer; their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and they are well prepared for their next stage of learning. Most of the regulations are met but the school still does not provide all the required information it gives to parents, including how it handles complaints. These issues were raised at the last inspection; however, the school now meets all the regulations for pupils' welfare, health and safety, including good

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

arrangements for their secure safeguarding, and complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. The school does not provide appropriate facilities for those who become ill while at school.

Quality of education

The school provides a good quality of education. The good curriculum is broad and balanced and, in addition to the National Curriculum, includes French and drama. There is specialist teaching in science, English, physical education (PE), art, history mathematics, music and French for older pupils. The curriculum covers all areas of learning for the Early Years Foundation Stage, where it is also good.

Despite some stated parental concerns, inspectors found that the school offers a wide range of additional activities and these include music tuition, drama, ballet, cooking, gardening and special themed days. For example, pupils have taken part in an Easter bonnet parade, sports day and the Christmas pantomime Aladdin, when the younger children performed a nativity. Pupils take part in various events and trips, and last year had visits to Hever Castle and the lifeboat centre in Hastings. Each year, Year 6 pupils go on a day trip to France. There are good links with the local community and the school takes part in local sporting tournaments, as well as educational competitions for small schools.

Teaching and assessment are good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, but lack consistency throughout the school. One science lesson observed stretched the pupils' knowledge about everyday substances, challenging them as to whether they were acid or alkali liquids and testing them with litmus paper. Pupils' writing is neat and well presented in their books. As a result of mainly good teaching, most pupils make good progress and achieve high standards by the time they leave, many having secured their future place at a grammar school. The school prepares them well for their future aspirations as most gain places to the schools of their first choice.

Teachers generally have good subject knowledge and their lessons are planned well to meet the needs of the pupils. They mark the pupils' work carefully and set homework assignments, which include the opportunity to finish work at home. Where teaching is weaker, the planning does not allow for different tasks to be given to pupils of different abilities, although pupils are treated as individuals and are supported well. Currently, the school has no pupils identified as requiring support for special education needs or disabilities. Some pupils commented that occasionally they found the work too easy, although in the older classes, inspectors found some challenging work being covered in both English and mathematics. For example, pupils were able to construct pie charts from data and talk about the different methods they would use. In English, they used conditional sentences adeptly and could explain in what context they would be appropriate.

There is a framework in place to assess pupils' abilities through a range of diagnostic tests and external examinations, including national tests at ages 7 and 11. These indicate that pupils make good progress over time at the school. However, this information is not used to track pupils' progress through the school to ensure that all are making the highest levels of progress of which they are capable. Parents would welcome a more public celebration of their children's success and achievements.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding overall and they enjoy their time at school, from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards. One pupil commented in response to the questionnaire that they never want to leave the school. They are enthusiastic learners and get on well socially with each other and with the wide range of age groups in the school. However, there has been some misbehaviour in the playground. Pupils say that sanctions are rightly imposed when such incidents occur and that they are confident about whom to talk to if they have worries or concerns. Pupils state their views confidently through their elected head of class and house captains, but as yet the school has not constituted a formal school council which meets regularly. Attendance is high and behaviour is good overall. It is exemplary in a number of classes when pupils are working hard, as they feel encouraged to do well because of the climate of rewards that underpins their work. Pupils have some opportunities to take responsibility, particularly in Year 6 where they mentor Year 1 pupils at lunchtimes. They raise money through charities both locally and abroad and are developing some understanding of society around them and how it works. They have a good moral awareness of what is right, and a clear understanding of those less fortunate than themselves. They are active in the local community, regularly singing at a local care home at Christmas. They study different faiths of the world through their religious education studies and have a good understanding of different faiths and cultures from around the world and in their own community. Such experiences help prepare them for their future adult lives and economic well-being as citizens.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Pupils are very well cared for and this area of provision is good. There is a high ratio of staff to pupils throughout the school and they are supervised effectively in class, outside and when taken off site. Pupils are happy and feel that the school promotes their health and safety well. The school has produced policies and procedures on welfare, health and safety, but some lack up-to-date review and as yet they are not all available for all staff and parents. For example, although arrangements for child protection are secure, there is no over-arching policy for the safeguarding of children which has been made available for parents.

School lunches are nutritious and follow a three-week menu cycle which is shared with the pupils. Most pupils eat a school lunch even though a few parents commented that their children are not encouraged to eat healthily. When asked,

pupils know what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and while at school they know they are not allowed sweets and fizzy drink; during lunch they are offered fruit and salad every day and many take up this option. Many take part in sports activities when they can and are conscious about keeping themselves fit.

Safeguarding procedures are secure and all members of staff have undertaken first aid training and there is one designated child protection officer in the school. Fire checks are carried out and the school tests the fire escape procedures regularly. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, amended by the Special Educational Needs & Disability Act 2001.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has established suitable procedures for ensuring that, prior to taking up their responsibilities, all teaching and non-teaching staff and the proprietorial body are checked for their suitability to work with children and young people. The school now maintains a single central register of such checks as required.

School's premises and accommodation

The accommodation is maintained to a high standard and meets the needs of the pupils and staff well, ensuring safe and effective learning. Most classrooms are of a good size, decorated to a good standard and are organised, tidy and clean. Desks and chairs are of appropriate quality and size. The extensive outside area includes green fields, tennis courts and other hard-surfaced areas. There is a spacious hall and some specialist teaching areas for art, music, science and cooking. There are two music practice rooms. The hall is used often for assemblies, theatre productions, dining, ballet, indoor PE and music tuition. The outside learning environment for the Early Years Foundation Stage is under-developed and under-used and this limits the curricular provision for the youngest children. The school does not have a medical room for those who become ill. Disability access is currently limited to the ground floor but there is a suitable three-year plan to accommodate adults or pupils with disabilities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents are provided with a full annual report and a half-year summary report of their children's progress. They meet staff twice a year to discuss their children's standards and progress. Parents of the oldest pupils are individually supplied with termly results from internal school tests and are given information about how their children have performed against national standards and tests at the end of each key stage. However, the school does not give parents the school's overall performance against national expectations and parents expressed a wish to know how well the school performed. Information for parents is available through a website and prospectus as well as through regular newsletters but some policies lack regular review and update, and the safeguarding of children policy is not made available to

all parents. Parents are made aware of the complaints procedures but are unclear about how long complaints should take to resolve.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has procedures in place for handling complaints; these are available on request and are referred to in the prospectus, although a few parents said that they did not know about the procedures. The school's procedures do not set a clear enough time line for how long it will take to deal with a complaint at its first stage of enquiry.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Good leadership and management of this setting have ensured its good provision and outcomes. Children start with good social and personal skills and some early skills in literacy and numeracy. They make good progress through the Nursery and Reception years and leave Kindergarten 2 with above average performance across all areas of learning. This development in independence and basic skills equips them well for their next stage of more structured learning.

A welcoming environment helps children to settle quickly, develop confidence and feel safe. The well-resourced curriculum provides a wide range of exciting activities and experiences which promote learning effectively. However, the covered outside area with direct access from both the classrooms was not used during the inspection as an extended outdoor learning environment, restricting children's experiences in choices about whether they want to learn outdoors or inside whatever the weather.

Teaching is consistently good. Each class has a full-time teaching assistant who works alongside the classroom teacher in organising a range of appropriate activities for children to choose from. There is a good balance of teacher-led and child-initiated activities while indoors. Children enjoy eating their snacks and drinks independently. They can choose from a wide range of toys, sand or water play and happily share these. Teachers prepare and plan resources carefully. Children demonstrate good concentration skills and give confident answers to questions. Children are assessed regularly against the Early Years Foundation Stage profile when they start and then at the end of Kindergarten 2. However, as yet this information is not analysed to determine progress and development over the two years.

All staff have completed relevant training in first aid. Children's personal development and behaviour are good because all adults ensure that the safeguarding, welfare and well-being of each child are secure.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(3)(e))
- provide to parents or publish on the website a copy of the school's safeguarding children policy (paragraph 6(4)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- provide clear timescales for the management of the complaint when at stage 1 so that parents have a clearer view of the processes in place (paragraph 7(c)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the consistency of the quality and development of teaching skills to ensure that more teaching is good by the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the learning throughout the school
- ensure that the Early Years Foundation Stage outdoor learning environment is used all year round to enable children to make choices about where they want to learn
- extend assessment procedures to inform teachers better about the progress children are making in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality and effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

What are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage like?		✓		
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage like?		✓		
How effective is the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
How good is the overall effectiveness: How well does the school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		

School details

Name of school	Shernold School		
DCSF number	886/6030		
Unique reference number (URN)	118972		
Type of school	Preparatory school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1935		
Age range of pupils	3–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 59	Girls: 68	Total: 127
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,450–£5,475		
Address of school	Hill Place Queens Avenue Maidstone Kent ME16 0ER		
Telephone number	01622 752868		
Fax number	01622 752868		
Email address	shernold@shernold.plus.com		
Headteacher	Mrs S Dinsmore		
Proprietor	Mrs V Waite		
Reporting inspector	Linda Kelsey HMI		
Dates of inspection	9–10 February 2010		